

News Release



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Mountain-Prairie Region
134 Union Boulevard
Lakewood, Colorado 80228

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
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Exhibit 7

Public Comment Sought on Amended Habitat Conservation Plan and Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

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DENVER – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is seeking public comment on the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation's (DNRC) application to amend an incidental take permit to authorize additional incidental take on 81,416 acres of proposed Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) land.

The amendment would change incidental take numbers for the threatened grizzly bear, Canada lynx, bull trout, and unlisted westslope cutthroat trout as a result of the additional proposed lands. The take will not reduce the likelihood of the survival and recovery of these species in the wild.

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) prohibits "take" of a listed species. However, the ESA allows for the issuance of "incidental take" permits for endangered and threatened species when the take is the unintended result of otherwise lawful activities, and as long as the applicant designs and implements a HCP that minimizes and mitigates harm to the impacted species.

The DNRC is also proposing to amend their HCP to incorporate terms of a 2015 settlement agreement, which would not result in any changes to the permit. The DNRC is proposing to amend its original 2010 HCP so that its relevant conservation commitments to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts of incidental take are implemented on the additional acres.

The Service is publishing a draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for public review. The draft SEIS analyzes potential effects to the covered species and other factors to the human environment that would result in implementing the proposed amended HCP and amended incidental take permit. The Service will publish a notice of availability (NOA) for the draft SEIS and HCP in the *Federal Register* today to alert the public that these draft documents are ready for public comment and review. All of these draft documents are available at: <https://www.regulations.gov>.

Once the NOA is published, public comments will be accepted for 45 days. The Service will consider all public comments and analyze impacts to the covered species and resources before making a decision. Throughout this process, the Service strives to conserve protected species, comply with applicable laws, and address public concerns.

The public will be able to submit comments electronically via www.regulations.gov or via the Montana DNRC website at <http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/trust/forest-management/hcp/hcp-announcements>. Comments will also be accepted via U.S. mail or hand-delivery to Public Comments Processing, Attn: Docket No. FWS-R6-ES-2017-0044; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Headquarters, MS: BPHC; 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA, 22041-3803.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service.

For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <https://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/>. Connect with our Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/USFWSMountainPrairie>, follow our tweets at <http://twitter.com/USFWSMtnPrairie>, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwsmtnpairie/>.

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